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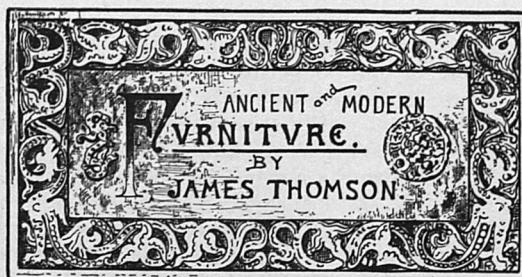
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A SERIES OF ARTICLES—NUMBER EIGHT.

THE FINISHING.

IN the production of a piece of furniture, not the least important consideration is the polishing or finishing process. The object of this process is two-fold—first as a preservative by filling the pores, and thereby rendering the wood susceptible to atmospheric variation, second, to improve the appearance of the wood and bring to view its full and latent beauties.

In olden times it is doubtful if much attention was given to this now important matter. It is more than probable that where any attempt at a finish was made at all, nothing more than a coating of wax was applied. Very many of the examples of ancient furniture existing at the present time are still as from the plane, presenting no evidences of any attempt at a finish. And in such examples as we find finished, it is not unlikely work of more modern times.

The waxy method of our ancestors, if it fell far short of perfection, possessed the merit of extreme simplicity, presenting no technical difficulties to prevent any one having a supply of patience, and capable of exerting the necessary muscular effort, in attaining satisfactory results.

While for many years we find wax as a finish for woodwork filling every requirement, it could not be expected to stand comparison with the lacquer work of Japan, specimens of which were occasionally finding their way to Europe, and when these tangible evidences of the wonderful arts of a mysterious people reached the court of France, only too glad to adopt some novelty, lacquer work became the rage. It was now no longer fashionable to have furniture with other than bright polished surfaces, the dull sober furniture of other days could not well consort with the delicate trifles from the east. The Japanese work was of surpassing excellence, and the process of production long remained a secret to Europeans. The lacquer consists of a red resin extracted by incision from a tree indigenous to some provinces of China and Japan, and is used in a very thin state, repeated coatings being applied and long periods of drying being required in the operation. For its success much is owing to the favorable climate.

During the rage for lacquer work, many pieces of furniture of French manufacture were sent to the Orient to be lacquered. And one need not be surprised to learn that many home efforts were made in the way of imitations, the most notable

To this period must be assigned the introduction of many of the methods of furniture finishing as practiced at the present time. The discovery of woods of great beauty of veining and coloring available in furniture making, and far surpassing any then in use, gave an impetus to the employment of wood as a decorative material, depending on qualities inherent in itself to an extent hitherto unknown.

The end desired being the display of the beauties of material used to the best possible advantage, and the further consideration of its being costly was sufficient inducement to cut the wood in thin slices or veneers, which, glued on a base of inferior material, gave an impression of solidity and value which it did not possess. This period more than any other marked the beginning of many such vicious practices, the baneful influences of which we find it all but possible to shake off even at the present time. Utility soon became of but secondary importance, every other consideration being sacrificed for show. Furniture

would-be purchaser, the question of durability being left to take care of itself.

In finishing woodwork at the present time, it is customary, as a matter of economy, to use what is technically known as a filler—a substance intended to fill the porous portions of the wood and bring them level with the surface of harder fibre. As there are two kinds of fillers used—solid and liquid, it is of the utmost importance that we should understand thoroughly the nature and action of each, as very much depends on the choice in working out a satisfactory result. The base of the greater part of the fillers used is plaster of paris or whiting mixed in oil, into which may be incorporated some coloring matter, bringing the substance into conformity with the wood; there is also used benzine or turpentine to hasten the drying process.

A moment's reflection should convince one that the effect of so much opaque material injected into the open grain of the wood can be no improvement to the appearance. We might, per-



often assumed the most fantastic and eccentric of shapes, surfaces were intentionally undulated, and sweeps calculated to display the markings were much used. For the same reason a polish of lacquer or varnish was applied, bringing out the beauty of veining and coloring to a degree exceeding results obtained by any previous method. The age of show and glitter had dawned, painting and gilding alone disputed the sway of the fascinating polished surface.

The use of hard gums as wood fillers soon

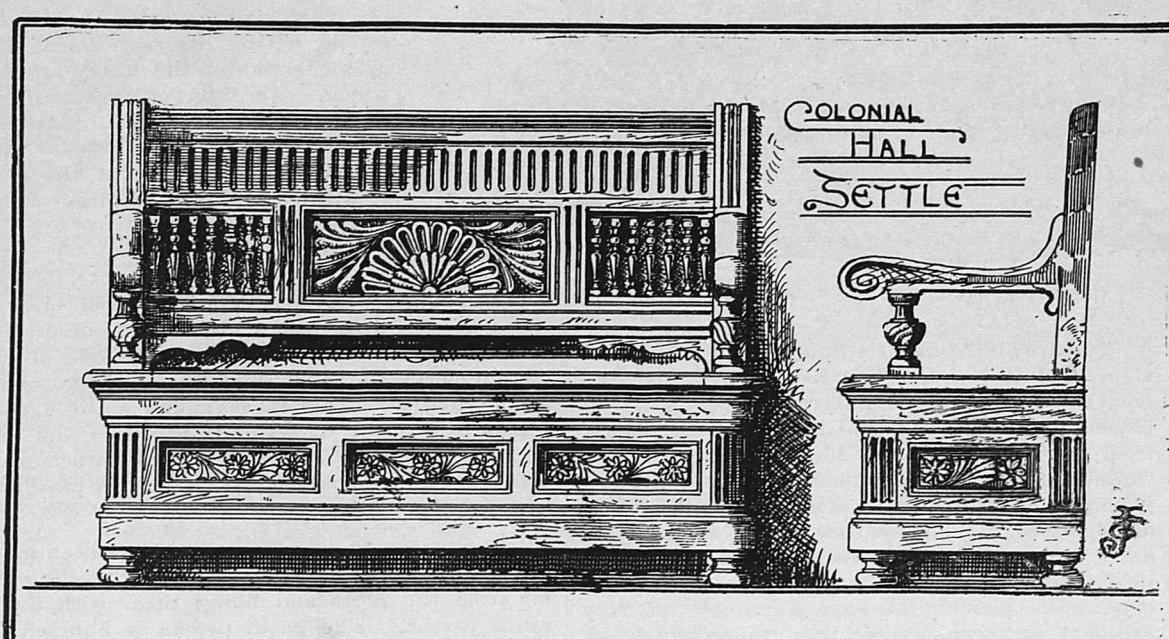
happened here make an exception in the case of wood with large open figure, where the filling by contrast defines the markings of the grain. Should the opaque material be used on a close grained wood, the result is that more or less remains on the surface, and to this extent obscures any natural beauty of marking and color.

To obtain the best possible results, and also bring to view the hidden beauties of the wood, one should use a transparent liquid filler, not necessarily white but clear, filling the pores up solid, and imparting to the surface a film as of glass. Nothing improves wood so much as linseed oil, and we should begin with a coat of that, the action of oil being on wood fibre as on paper—rendering it more transparent. When thoroughly dry use *pure shellac*, white or colored as the wood demands, as many coats as are necessary to fill the pores and obtain a satisfactory result.

Shellac or spirit varnish, while the most expensive, is, in the estimation of many, the best, and for woodwork, in our opinion, there can be no more desirable finish, thoroughly rubbed down with pumice stone and oil, under the manipulations of skillful hands, it acquires a flat dull gloss that is lasting and ever satisfying to the eye.

The staining of woods is also worthy of consideration when it is desired to stain mahogany, cherry, or other close grained woods of a darker shade than natural, it should be accomplished by the use of some clear stain or dye entirely devoid of sediment, pigments in oil, as we have before remarked being altogether unsuited for the purpose. The best method of staining mahogany is by the use of some alkali such as potash, ammonia, etc., either of these dissolved in water and applied, have the immediate effect of neutralizing and bringing to the surface the acid of the wood, and thus increasing the depth of coloring.

For oak or ash, the stain of pigments in oil if used, should be well rubbed into the grain and all superfluous particles removed; in no case should the coloring be used in the shellac as it would then be simply deposited on the surface. Oak may be stained by the use of Vandyke brown or umber. Olivine shades of green may be obtained by liquid ammonia, or the ammonia may be used to fumigate the wood.



because the most successful effort in that direction being the invention of a carriage painter of heraldic ornaments, flowers, etc., named Vernis Martin. He used a transparent lac varnish the composition of which he kept a profound secret. This varnish, it has been thought entirely probable, he had derived from Japan through missionaries returning from that country, who had made lacquer work a study when there.

extended to the cheapest class of furniture, resulting in the employment of inferior gums, giving a brilliancy only temporary. These had for their base some brittle resinous substance, having quick drying qualities, such as benzoin, which has been and continues to be much used by manufacturers of the cheap showy furniture made only for sale, with such people the only consideration being the coaxing of the money from the pocket of the